

Hobbies

Supreme Court won't go on treasure hunt

By Roger Boye

The U.S. Supreme Court has refused to hear a case involving the ownership of thousands of gold coins and gold bars salvaged from the remains of a ship that sank in 1857.

That decision probably will foster a protracted legal battle in lower courts between a group of insurance companies and the salvagers. The companies believe that they should own the treasure because their predecessor firms had paid off the original owners of the gold soon after the ship went down.

But the Columbus-America Discovery Group, which found the ship off South Carolina after years of work, plans to argue in a federal district court this summer that the companies have provided insufficient proof that they actually had paid any claims, said F.

Michael Lorz, a Columbus-America spokesman.

The salvagers also have said that under the traditional law of finds, ownership of treasure long since abandoned should go to those who discover, recover and conserve it.

But last August a federal appeals court ruled that the insurance companies had not abandoned title to the treasure, a decision that the Supreme Court "let stand" by refusing to consider the case.

The ship—the "Central America"—sank in a hurricane about 160 miles offshore, taking 425 people and three tons of gold down with it. The metal had been mined in California and was on the final leg of a journey to New York via Panama.

● ● ●
Uncle Sam has launched its annual proof-set program by main-

taining a price increase first made last summer.

Each five-coin, non-silver set of 1993 will cost \$12.50, up from the \$11 per set charged before July 1. The \$11 price had held since the early 1980s.

In March, the United States Mint sent order forms to its 1.9 million customers. To get on the mailing list or to obtain a form, write to the Customer Service Center, United States Mint, 10001 Aerospace Drive, Lanham, Md. 20706.

Order forms for the 10-coin 1993 uncirculated sets will be mailed this spring and for the five-coin 1993 silver proof sets this summer. Proof coins are struck at least twice with polished dies to create frosted images and mirror-like backgrounds.

Mint officials probably will sell at least 2.5 million non-silver proof sets this year.